Keys & Celestial Plural Marriage

Study Guide Overview

In this study we will be looking at what is necessary to live and perpetuate in order to preside over the keys of the Priesthood – especially Celestial Plural Marriage.

Concepts -

> Without living and keeping alive Plural Marriage a man is not qualified to preside over the keys of the Priesthood, or succeed someone who does.

Read the following -

> John Taylor, 1882 Revelation
> Living Plural Celestial Marriage ... quotes
> "Who Holds the keys?" Article

Key Questions -

> Can someone preside over the keys of the Priesthood without having received all the ordinances?
> Can someone preside ... without having lived all of God's laws?
> Can someone preside ... without performing all the ordinances and administering all the laws?

Study Suggestions -

Please print out this guide, and prayerfully read and ponder over the teachings of the prophets, asking yourself any of the question included here, and noting down any additional questions that arise from your study. (If you have a spouse or young adult children try to study these things with them.)

Online Resources -

> Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith
> http://www.boap.org/LDS/Joseph-Smith/Teachings/
>
> The Journals of Discourses
> http://journalofdiscourses.org
>
> Unpublished Revelations
>
> Note: readings (except scriptural) are included in the Resources section

Living Laws, Receiving and Performing Ordinances Necessary to Presiding Over the Keys

Can any Priesthood holder give what he hasn't received?

"Can any man or set of men officiate in dispensing the laws and administering the ordinances of the Kingdom of God or of the kingdoms and governments of the world legally, without first obeying those laws and submitting to those ordinances themselves?...do not forget that no man has authority to officiate in the ordinances of heavenly or earthly governments only so far as he has obeyed them himself."

Brigham Young, October 8th, 1854.

Can keys be taken because of unrighteousness?

For unto you I have given the keys of the kingdom and if you transgress not they shall never be taken from you.

1832 Revelation to Joseph Smith, Unpublished Revelations 13:16.

Can keys be taken if ordinances are not obeyed or entered into?

And the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., through the means I have appointed, while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances.

Doctrine & Covenants 64:5.

However, even if one key holder fails a qualified Apostle with the same authority will succeed him

D&C 43:4 But verily, verily, I say unto you, that none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him; for if it be taken from him he shall not have power except to appoint another in his stead.

5 And this shall be a law unto you, that ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you as revelations or commandments;

6 And this I give unto you that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me.

7 For verily I say unto you, that he that is ordained of me shall come in at the gate and be ordained as I have told you before, to teach those revelations which you have received and shall receive through him whom I have appointed.

"There are many things that belong to the powers of the Priesthood and the keys thereof,
that have been kept hidden from before the foundation of the world;
they are hid from the wise and prudent to be revealed in the last times."

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 170

Living Plural Celestial Marriage Necessary to Presiding Over the Priesthood

Read the 1882 revelation to John Taylor first

Joseph Smith

An angel of God ... told him [Joseph Smith] that, unless he moved forward and establish plural marriage, his Priesthood would be taken from him.
Eliza R. Snow, Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, p. 69-70.

Heber was told by Joseph that if he did not do this [take another wife] he would lose his Apostleship.
Life of Heber C. Kimball, Orson F. Whitney, p. 336 (1888 edition).

When this commandment was given, it was so far religious, and so far binding upon the Elders of this Church, that it was told them if they were not prepared to enter into it, and to stem the torrent of opposition that would come in consequence of it, the keys of the kingdom would be taken from them and given to others.
John Taylor, 7 June 1866, Journal of Discourses 11:221-222.

John Taylor

Thus saith the Lord to the Twelve, and to the Priesthood and people of my Church:...You may appoint Seymour B. Young to fill up the vacancy in the presiding quorum of Seventies, if he will conform to My law: For it is not meet that men who will not abide My law shall preside over My Priesthood;
Revelation to John Taylor, October 13th, 1882.

If we do not embrace that principle soon, the keys will be turned against us. If we do not keep the same law our Heavenly Father has kept we cannot go with him. A man obeying a lesser law is not qualified to preside over those who keep a higher law.
John Taylor, October 10th, 1882, Life of Wilford Woodruff, Matthias F. Cowley, p. 542.

The leading men of Israel who are presiding over stakes will have to obey the law of Abraham, or they will have to stop.
Wilford Woodruff Journal, October 10th, 1882.

In 1884 Taylor reported another revelation which urged monogamists to resign ecclesiastical offices in the Church.
Abraham H. Cannon Journal, 6 April 1884.

This situation was settled in an early day case where Heber J. Grant, as President of the Tooele Stake, attempted to correct Brother Samuel Woolley. Brother Grant was not living the law, while Brother Woolley was. The latter refused to receive instructions from Brother Grant, claiming immunity because the President was not living as high a law as he was. Brother Grant took the question up with his file leaders, President John Taylor and counselors. They instructed him that Brother Woolley was right, since he (Brother Grant) was not living or abiding in the law, he was not qualified to direct Brother Woolley who was faithfully abiding in that law. Thus, at the present time, few of the general authorities, stake presidents, or bishops are qualified to Preside over the Priesthood of God.
Joseph Musser Journal, p. 68-9.

Bishop John Sharp's superiors proffered that "any Priesthood holder who failed to sustain the law of God - polygamy - forfeited his right to rule in the midst of His people."
James B. Allen, Essays on Public Ethics, p. 48.

Wilford Woodruff

We have many Bishops and Elders who have but one wife. They are abundantly qualified to enter the higher law and take more, but their wives will not let them. Any man who permits a woman to lead him and bind him down is but little account in the Church and kingdom of God.

Wilford Woodruff, Matthias F. Cowley, 490 (1909 edition).

Joseph F. Smith

Jerome Sweet claimed that he "went to a special priesthood meeting where Joseph F. Smith was the speaker and he said that men holding positions in the priesthood should either marry in polygamy or they should step down and let someone who would marry have the position."

Isn't One Wife Enough, Kimball Young, p. 107.

Misc Apostles

George Q. Cannon told young Joseph C. Bently that the only reason the elder Bently [his father] had not been advanced in the Church was because he had not taken additional wives.

Joseph T. Bentley, Life & Letters of Joseph C. Bentley, p. 77-85.

George Teasdale said to a meeting of Patriarchs in 1902 that they were unworthy of their office if they did not reverance a belief in Celestial Marriage.

Joseph W. Musser Diary, 11 (& 17) November, 1902

Apostle John Henry Smith in a meeting of the First Presidency and Apostles, said that it was in practicing polygamy that men learned "the true order of government."

Rudger Clawson Diary, 7 January 1902.

Apostle Rudger Clawson urged that only women who believed in polygamy be appointed to Church positions. And newly called members of certain Stake Presidencies were asked to declare their willingness to put the doctrine into practice.

Rudger Clawson Diary, 16 January 1902 & 8 July 1903.
(see also Jessie L. Embry's interview with Theodore Bennion, 9 June 1976)

Marriner W. Merrill in the early 1880's called Andrew L. Hyer to preside over the seventies quorum in Richmond, Utah. "But first you've got to take another wife," Merrill warned.

Jesse Embry, "Charles Edmund Richardson Families:
A Case Study of Mormon Polygamy", p. 4, unpublished paper.

Went to hear A. H. Cannon speak. Was surprised to hear my name read out by him as one recommended to become a Seventy.

Following questions were proposed to all who expected to be ordained: (1) Has your past life been commendable in the sight of God? (2) If not, can you overcome your weaknesses and keep pure before God? (3) Are you prepared to leave everything to go and stay upon missions till they are fulfilled? (4) Do you believe in the principle of Celestial Marriage and are you prepared when the time is made known to enter therein?

Thinking my mind was fully settled on those matters, I stepped forward and under the hands of A. H. Cannon and others was ordained a Seventy.

Journal of Douglas M. Todd, Sr., 27 February 1887.

Revelation to John Taylor on Priesthood Authority

13 October 1882 *(UR 83)*
Salt Lake City

Thus saith the Lord to the Twelve, and to the Priesthood and people of my Church:
2 Let my servants George Teasdale and Heber J. Grant be appointed to fill the vacancies in the Twelve, that you may be fully organized and prepared for the labours devolving upon you, for you have a great work to perform;
3 And then proceed to fill up the presiding quorum of Seventies, and assist in organizing that body of my Priesthood who are your co-laborers in the ministry.
4 You may appoint Seymour B. Young to fill up the vacancy in the presiding quorum of Seventies, if he will conform to my law:
5 For it is not meet that men who will not abide my law shall preside over my Priesthood;
6 And, then proceed forthwith and call to your aid any assistance that you may require from among the Seventies to assist you in your labors in introducing and maintaining the Gospel, among the Lamanites throughout the land.
7 And then let High Priests be selected under the direction of the First Presidency to preside over the various organizations that shall exist among this people;
8 That these who receive the Gospel may be taught in the doctrines of my Church and in the ordinances and laws thereof, and also in the things pertaining to my Zion and my Kingdom, saith the Lord, that they may be one with you in my Church and in my Kingdom.
9 Let the Presidency of my Church be one in all things; and let the Twelve also be one in all things; and let them all be one with me and am one with the Father.
10 And let the High Priests organize themselves, and purify themselves, and prepare themselves for this labor and for all other labors that they may be called upon to fulfill.
11 And let the Presidents of Stakes also purify themselves, and this Priesthood and people of the Stakes over which they preside,
12 And organize the Priesthood in the various stakes according to my law, in all the various departments thereof, in the High Councils, in the Elders Quorums, and in the Bishops and their Councils, and in the Quorums of Priests, Teachers and Deacons, that every Quorum may be fully organized according to the order of my Church;
13 And, then, let them inquire into the standing and fellowship of all that hold my holy Priesthood in their several Stakes;
14 And if they find these that are unworthy let them remove them, except they repent;
15 For my Priesthood, whom I have called and whom I have sustained and honored, shall honor me and obey my laws, and the laws of my Holy Priesthood, or they shall not be considered worthy to hold my Priesthood, saith the Lord.
16 And let my Priesthood humble themselves before me, and seek not their own will but my will;
17 For if my Priesthood whom I have chosen, and called, and endowed with the Spirit and gifts of their several callings, and with the powers thereof do not acknowledge me I will not acknowledge them, saith the Lord; for I will be honored and obeyed by my Priesthood.
18 And, then, I call upon my Priesthood, and upon all of my people to repent of their sins and shortcomings, of their covetousness, and pride, and self will, and of all their iniquities wherein they sin against me;
19 And to seek with all humility to fulfill my law, as my Priesthood, my Saints, and my people;
20 And I call upon the heads of families to put their houses in order according to the law of God, and attend to the various duties and responsibilities appointed therewith, and to purify themselves before me, and to purge out iniquity from their households.
21 And I will bless and be with you, saith the Lord,
22 And ye shall gather together in your holy places wherein ye assemble to call upon me, and ye shall ask for such things as are right,

23 And I will hear your prayers, and my Spirit and power shall be with you, and my blessing shall be upon you, upon your families, your dwellings, and your households, upon your flocks and herds and fields, your orchards and vineyards, and upon all that pertain to you;
24 And you shall be my people and I will be your God;
25 And your enemies shall not have dominion over you, for I will preserve you and confound them, saith the Lord,
26 And they shall not have power nor dominion over you;
27 For my word shall go forth, and my work shall be accomplished, and my Zion shall be established, and my rule and my power and my dominion shall prevail among my people, and all nations shall yet acknowledge me. Even so, Amen.

John Taylor Papers, Church Historians Office

> "it is necessary to know who holds the keys of power, and who does not or we are likely to be deceived." *(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 336)*

Most orthodox LDS Church members and Mormon Fundamentalists accept Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and John Taylor as Prophets, Church Presidents, and Presidents of the Priesthood, all holding the keys of Elijah (or the authority to preside over all of the ordinances). Past this point there has been some controversy over Wilford Woodruff to Joseph F. Smith and beyond.[1]

For those studying the fullness of the Gospel who realise the need for the authority to live the higher laws and ordinances of the Gospel this can lead to confusion: Have the keys of the Priesthood continued to our day and how can we judge who holds them? The best - if not the only source - our Latter-day Saint readers will accept is the teachings of and revelations to those Prophets we all agree on the calling and authority of. If we claim authority through Joseph Smith and say we believe in the word of the Lord to him, then there is no better place to begin to study these matters than with the Doctrine and Covenants.

A continuation of the keys of the Priesthood

The first question we need to address is whether the Lord has promised that the keys of the Priesthood would continue throughout this dispensation. God answered this within the same year of the organization of the Church and just a year following Joseph receiving the Priesthood from Peter, James and John, when He promised that the "keys of my kingdom" were committed "for the last times; and for the fullness of times."[2] He later informed the Prophet that it would be those keys "committed unto man" that would allow the gospel to "roll forth ... until it has filled the whole earth."[3] As those times have not yet come, the keys must remain to fulfil God's promises and purposes.

But is it still possible those keys could have been lost if the Lord's prophet 'fell' and disqualified himself? The Lord has allowed for such a possibility, and made the provision that even in a situation where the man holding the keys might become unworthy of his calling, that responsibility would pass to someone who was qualified and who had received that authority through him:

> "But verily, verily, I say unto you, that none else shall be appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abide in me.
>
> But verily, verily, I say unto you, that none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him; for if it be taken from him he shall not have power except to appoint another in his stead.
>
> For verily I say unto you, that he that is ordained of me shall come in at the gate and be ordained as I have told you before, to teach those revelations which you have received and shall receive through him whom I have appointed."[4]

Worthiness, however, is not the only condition upon which those who claim to hold the keys and preside over them must meet.

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1 Just as Mormonism found itself with many people claiming to be Joseph's successor after his death, likewise most Fundamentalists accept John and Lorin Woolley (Because of the authority they received through John Taylor in September 1886) as leaders appointed by God, but after Lorin's death there arose many men claiming to be his successor, or to have authority independently of him.

2 Doctrine and Covenants 27:13

3 Doctrine and Covenants 65:2

4 Doctrine and Covenants 43:4

A continuation of ordinances, and laws

The Prophet Joseph clearly taught the Saints that all the ordinances of the Gospel were "instituted in heaven before the foundation of this world in the Priesthood for the salvation of man," that they were "not to be altered or changed," and that "all must be saved upon the same principles." He added that they "must be kept in the very way God has appointed; otherwise their Priesthood will prove a cursing instead of a blessing."[5]

Even Joseph Smith's Priesthood authority was dependent upon him receiving all of the ordinances in the manner that God restored them, as we can see from the Lord's promise to him that "the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from" him "while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances."[6]

If this was a condition upon which Joseph's authority rested then it would also be a test by which we can judge anyone who claims to be his successor and hold the keys he did. Have they received all the ordinances, and kept them "in the very way God has appointed," or are there ordinances they have not received or changes they have tried to make to those they have? Could any man ever have the right to perform an ordinances he had not received? Brigham Young posed this same question to the Saints of his day:

> "Can any man or set of men officiate in dispensing the laws and administering the ordinances of the Kingdom of God or of the kingdoms and governments of the world legally, without first obeying those laws and submitting to those ordinances themselves? ... do not forget that no man has authority to officiate in the ordinances of heavenly or earthly governments only so far as he has obeyed them himself."[7]

That keeping alive such ordinances is necessary to hold and exercise the keys of the Priesthood is something Joseph Smith explained very plainly in his day:

> "The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah is, that ye have power to hold the key of the revelation, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth; and to receive, obtain, and perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God"[8]

He was also by the Lord that if he did not introduce a principle he would lose any authority he already had:

> "An angel of God ... told him that, unless he moved forward and establish plural marriage, his Priesthood would be taken from him."[9]

Likewise Heber C. Kimball was told by the Prophet that if he did not take another wife "he would lose his Apostleship."[10] This was not just a condition placed upon Brothers Joseph and Heber, but upon all the Apostles:

> "When this commandment was given, it was so far religious, and so far binding upon the Elders of this Church, that it was told them if they were not prepared to enter into it, and to stem the torrent of opposition that would come in consequence of it, the keys of the kingdom would be taken from them and given to others."[11]

The necessity of living this high and holy law to be able to preside over the Priesthood was repeated again by the Lord to his servant John Taylor in 1882, in which He said:

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5 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 168-9, see Heb 7:12
6 Doctrine and Covenants 64:5
7 Manuscript Addresses of Brigham Young, October 8th, 1854
8 History of the Church 6:251
9 Eliza R. Snow, Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow, p. 69-70
10 Life of Heber C. Kimball, Orson F. Whitney, p. 336 (1888 edition)
11 John Taylor, 7 June 1866, Journal of Discourses 11:221-222

> "Thus saith the Lord to the Twelve, and to the Priesthood and people of my Church: ... You may appoint Seymour B. Young to fill up the vacancy in the presiding quorum of Seventies, if he will conform to My law: For it is not meet that men who will not abide My law shall preside over My Priesthood; ... For my Priesthood, whom I have called and whom I have sustained and honored, shall honor one and obey my laws, and the laws of my Holy Priesthood, or they shall not be considered worthy to hold my Priesthood, saith the Lord."[12]

Some might ask, as undoubtedly some of the Saints did during President Taylor's tenure, "apart from the exalting purpose of this divine law, why was it so essential to the issue of Priesthood authority?" To this he plainly answered that "a man obeying a lesser law is not qualified to preside over those who keep a higher law."[13]

A continuation of Apostleship and the Fullness of the Priesthood

Although "all Priesthood is Melchizedek",[14] the Lord has designated different offices with specific commissions as well as special callings which both grant and limit the responsibilities of those called. The highest of all the offices within the Priesthood is that of Apostle, which comprehends all other offices.

They "hold the keys to open up the authority" of God's kingdom,[15] they can "ordain and set in order all the other officers of the church"[16] They were acknowledged as "Prophets, Seers, Revelators, and special witnesses to all the nations of the earth, holding the keys of the kingdom"[17] and were "enabled to unlock and unravel all things pertaining to the government of the Church, the welfare of society, the future destiny of men, and the agency, power and influence of spirits;"[18]

However, even being an Apostle does not necessarily given a person all of the authority or keys of the Priesthood. The Prophet Joseph taught that there were different degrees within the Melchizedek Priesthood itself, and it wasn't until the autumn of 1843 that he was "anointed and ordained to the highest and holiest order of the Priesthood."[19] This was fourteen years after he first received the Priesthood and became an Apostle himself,[20] eight years after the formation of the Quorum of Twelve,[21] seven after he received the keys of the Priesthood in the Kirtland Temple,[22] and a year after he first received the Endowment![23] He left us in no doubt that this authority was essential and that the Lord intended it to continue:

> "My feelings at the present time are that, inasmuch as the Lord Almighty has preserved me until today, He will continue to preserve me, by the united faith and prayers of the Saints, until I have fully accomplished my mission in this life, and so firmly established the dispensation of the fullness of the priesthood in the last days, that all the powers of earth and hell can never prevail against it."[24]

Not all of the Apostles or members of the First Presidency were considered ready or worthy to obtain this before Joseph's death, and because of this Brigham Young could rightly claim greater authority than Sidney Rigdon (who had not received that degree of Priesthood) and William Marks (who was not living all of God's

12 Revelation to John Taylor, 13 October 1882, Unpublished Revelations 83:4-5,15
13 John Taylor, Life of Wilford Woodruff, Matthias F. Cowley, p. 542
14 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 180
15 Doctrine and Covenants 124:128
16 Doctrine and Covenants 107:58
17 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 109
18 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 206, see p. 74
19 Joseph Smith Diary, 18 September 1843
20 Joseph Smith is called an Apostle in D&C 20:2 & Doctrine and Covenants 21:1.
21 14 February 1835
22 Doctrine and Covenants 110
23 May 1842
24 History of the Church 5:139

laws). Heber C. Kimball told Rigdon at the time that "He has no authority, only what he receives from the Church. ... He has not got the same authority as others: there are more than thirty men who have got higher authority than he has."[25]

Those Apostles and others who received this ordinance were considered the elect of God and members of the Church of the Firstborn,[26] a higher organisation with a greater mandate than the earthly LDS Church. Those who had not received this authority – no matter what their office in the Church – were considered subordinate to the quorum these Saints were members of, as is illustrated by a letter of the Twelve to William Smith:

> "the President of the Church and each of our Quorum [of Twelve Apostles] are amenable to the Quorum of which you are a member."[27]

This raises a question we musk ask those who claim to have all the authority that is necessary to administer the ordinances of exaltation, "Do they have the fullness of the Priesthood?" A man can only receive a fullness of the Priesthood from someone else who has, and it is only valid if they have received all necessary ordinances of the temple first, as Joseph taught that -

> "If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord."[28]

Heber Kimball wouldn't mention the names of those "who have got authority" in Nauvoo as he feared "the enemy will try to kill them."[29] President Young was also worried about this prospect, but was determined that whatever happened to him the authority should continue.

> "I know there are those in our midst who will seek the lives of the Twelve as they did the lives of Joseph and Hyrum. We shall ordain others and give the fullness of the priesthood, so that if we are killed the fullness of the priesthood may remain."[30]

It was paramount to keep that ordinance alive, because through it the highest and fullest degree of Priesthood was given, and without it no one could gain their exaltation or have the authority to exercise the full keys of the Priesthood and preside over them.

A continual and uninterrupted line of succession

God's "house is a house of order"[31] and whenever He has had men with authority upon the earth, one of them, by reason of seniority or special appointment has presided, and stood as an administrator and judge over all of the ordinances and laws of the Gospel. This is the pattern designated in the word of the Lord in which God states, "it must needs be that one be appointed of the High Priesthood to preside over the priesthood ... from the same comes the administering of ordinances and blessings"[32] There is only one man who occupies that presiding position at any one time,[33] and (as we pointed out at the beginning of our treatment of this subject), the Lord has designed that there will be a continual and uninterrupted line of men holding these keys until Jesus returns.

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25 Times and Seasons 5:663, see Trial of Sidney Rigdon, 8 September 1844. Note: Heber called those with higher authority "the secret Priesthood", see William Clayton diary, 23 May 1843
26 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 237
27 Letter of the Twelve to William Smith, Succession in the Presidency, B.H. Roberts, p. 23
28 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 308
29 Trial of Sidney Rigdon, 8 September 1844
30 Brigham Young, History of the Church 7:230
31 Doctrine and Covenants 132:8
32 Doctrine and Covenants 107:65,67
33 "there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred" (Doctrine and Covenants 132:7)

When assessing the claims of those who would call themselves Joseph Smith's successor as head of the Priesthood and holder of its keys, we have a right and responsibility to ask ourselves if they meet the criteria given in the scriptures and teachings of the prophets. Can they show:

- A continuation of administering all the same ordinances unchanged
- A continuation of maintaining the same laws, and living them
- A continuation of living and keeping alive Celestial Plural Marriage
- A continuation of the office of Apostle
- A continuation of the fullness of the Priesthood
- A continual and uninterrupted line of authority and succession from Joseph Smith to them

If they can satisfy all of these requirements then there is only one thing left for us to do, and that is to pray to the Lord for a spiritual witness that this person is the Lord's anointed Prophet (if our study of these areas has not already led us to that testimony), and to join with those Saints who share our faith, so that we can build up God's kingdom with them, and prove ourselves worthy of receiving all of God's ordinances and living all His laws.